

Remarks Honoring the 2009 Super Bowl Champion Pittsburgh Steelers
May 21, 2009

Hello, everybody. I first of all want to just acknowledge a few people that are here. First of all, some of my Cabinet members: Secretary of Agriculture, Tom Vilsack, who grew up as a maniacal Pittsburgh Steeler fan, he is here; Secretary of the Veterans Administration, Eric Shinseki, a war hero and somebody that is doing an outstanding job on behalf of our veterans; we have the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Admiral Mullen—Mike Mullen, as well as his lovely wife are here. Please give them a big round of applause. We've got some Pennsylvania folks around here: Senator Bob Casey; Senator Arlen Specter; Teresa Heinz Kerry; Representatives Tim Murphy, Mike Doyle, Glenn Thompson, Tom Rooney, and Charlie Wilson. Give them all a big round of applause.

Welcome to the White House, everybody. Before we begin, I want to offer a special welcome to the wounded warriors who have joined us today from Walter Reed and from the National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda. Thank you for your service.

And welcome back Dan Rooney and the entire Rooney family. For nearly five decades, Dan has been a tremendous ambassador for pro football and for the city of Pittsburgh. And in the years to come, all Americans will be fortunate to have his service as our United States Ambassador to Ireland.

Just a personal note: I had occasion of meeting a lot of people during the course of my campaign for the Presidency. I can tell you that I don't know anybody who is more of a gentleman, who is more loyal, who is more committed to excellence than Mr. Rooney. And he and his family have just been such an extraordinary pillar for the city of Pittsburgh. I'd like everybody to give them a big round of applause one more time. And he's humble. *[Laughter]* This kind of attention embarrasses him, but he has no choice.

Congratulations to the Super Bowl champion Pittsburgh Steelers for the NFL-record, sixth Lombardi Trophy. Some are calling it "Sixburgh" these days. *[Laughter]* Congratulations to all the fans of the Steeler Nation, who wave that Terrible Towel every Sunday.

Now, I already told these guys, no matter how big they are, I am a Bears fan. *[Laughter]* But it's no secret that I was pulling for the Steelers during the Super Bowl last year, and that's part of the reason why this is so much fun for me. This isn't me trying to have it both ways. Everybody knows I'm pretty serious about my sports teams, but growing up in Hawaii when I was a kid, we didn't have a local football team. And when I started playing, and I started paying attention to football, it was guys like Terry Bradshaw and Franco Harris and the Steel Curtain and Mean Joe Greene, who is here. Where's Mean Joe? There he is, right there. Those were the guys that were playing, and so I became a Steelers fan.

And last March, I actually got to hang out with Franco and "The Bus," Jerome Bettis, at an event in Pittsburgh. And Jerome even joined me when we went to meet some steelworkers on a shift change. And I got my own Terrible Towel.

But this is a new team for a new era. And that's embodied by Coach Tomlin, who's here with his lovely wife. And I want everybody to give Coach Tomlin a huge round of applause. He didn't just win the Super Bowl; he also happened to be NFL Coach of the Year, the youngest coach ever to win a Super Bowl.

And then there's the new Steel Curtain, the NFL's best defense last year, thanks to Dick LeBeau, who I think everybody acknowledges is one of the greatest defensive coordinators of all time—so where's Dick? There he is over there.

We've got the team captains up here: Big Ben Roethlisberger—give him—come on, give Big Ben a round of applause here; James Farrior, a Pro Bowler who made 133 tackles this season; Jeff Reed, who was clutch in the Super Bowl; Hines Ward, who was the Super Bowl MVP 4 years ago, who's always the happiest man in football. Hines is always happy.

And we've got this year's Super Bowl MVP, Santonio Holmes, who made one of the greatest touchdown catches I've ever seen. That means two of the last four Super Bowl MVPs hail from the Pittsburgh wide-receiving corps.

Now, I pointed out that that was a heck of a pass that Ben threw. But then one of the linemen pointed out that was some blocking on that play. *[Laughter]* So that just reminds you, that's what Steeler football is all about, it's a team effort. And this is a team that entered the season facing the most difficult schedule in the league. But guys like these thrive on that. They plowed through the regular season; they won every game in the AFC North; they took down the Chargers and the Ravens in the playoffs.

And I can't remember a more exciting Super Bowl. Arizona took the lead with 3 minutes left; Pittsburgh comes back with just 2 with that winning touchdown. Santonio had 73 of those yards on that drive, including the incredible game-winning, touchdown catch. And now they're champs. So obviously, these are guys who take their responsibilities on the football field seriously. But they take them just as seriously off the field. They're generous with their time for charity and for their communities. So that explains why we're doing something a little bit different here today than when sports champions usually come to visit the White House. These guys have agreed to stick around for a while, and we're going to team them up, not to run some plays, but to serve others.

I often say that the beauty of serving others is that anyone can do it. You don't have to be President, and you don't have to be a pro football player. All you need to do is to have a desire to make a difference, to give back to your community, and to contribute to your nation. And that's what we're going to do right here. We're going to work with the USO to put together 3,000 care packages for our troops serving in harm's way.

We're going to give back to those who've given so much for us. And I find that fitting and proper, a good way to kick off a weekend that serves to honor all the men and women who have worn the proud uniform of this country that we love.

So congratulations, again, Steelers, for an extraordinary season. Good luck next year, and thank you again for your willingness to go above and beyond and not just come here for a photo op, but to join the men and women who protect this country to make sure that we are safe.

Thank you very much, everybody. God bless you. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:49 p.m. on the South Lawn at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Deborah Mullen, wife of Adm. Michael G. Mullen, USN, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff; Teresa Heinz Kerry, chairman, Heinz Family Philanthropies and Heinz Endowments; Rep. Thomas J. Rooney of Florida; Rep. Glenn Thompson of Pennsylvania; Daniel M. Rooney, U.S. Ambassador-designate to Ireland and chairman, Pittsburgh Steelers; Terry Bradshaw, former quarterback, Franco Harris, former running back, Joe Greene, former defensive tackle, Jerome Bettis, former running back, Ben Roethlisberger, quarterback, James

Farrior, linebacker, Jeff Reed, placekicker, Hines Ward, wide receiver, and Santonio Holmes, wide receiver, Pittsburgh Steelers; and Kiya Winston Tomlin, wife of Coach Mike P. Tomlin of the Pittsburgh Steelers.

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Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Bettis, Jerome; Bradshaw, Terry; Casey, Robert P.; Doyle, Michael F.; Farrior, James; Greene, Joe; Harris, Franco; Holmes, Santonio; Kerry, Teresa Heinz; LeBeau, Dick; Mullen, Deborah; Mullen, Michael G.; Murphy, Timothy; Reed, Jeff; Roethlisberger, Ben; Rooney, Daniel M.; Rooney, Thomas J.; Shinseki, Eric K.; Specter, Arlen; Thompson, Glenn; Tomlin, Kiya Winston; Tomlin, Mike P.; Vilsack, Thomas J.; Ward, Hines; Wilson, Charles A.

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